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ABSTRACT

The Research Division for the Center for Creative Leadership is committed to staying abreast of research on leadership and to developing new research approaches to that topic. This paper examines some of the problems with the accumulated research on leadership, reviews some studies of managerial work that stimulate new ways of thinking about leadership in organizations, and suggests some directions that might improve our understanding of the topic. Four new ways of focusing on the leadership process are arrived at: (1) The organization is dynamic, not composed of a small number of fixed parts. (2) The leadership role does not imply unilateral control by the leader. (3) Much of human learning depends on the receipt of valid and timely feedback on the results of behavior. (4) Political activity, in the sense of developing and maintaining a set of contacts throughout the organization and its environment, is an important part of managerial work. (Author/BP

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Morgan W. McCall, Jr.

Technical Report
Number 2

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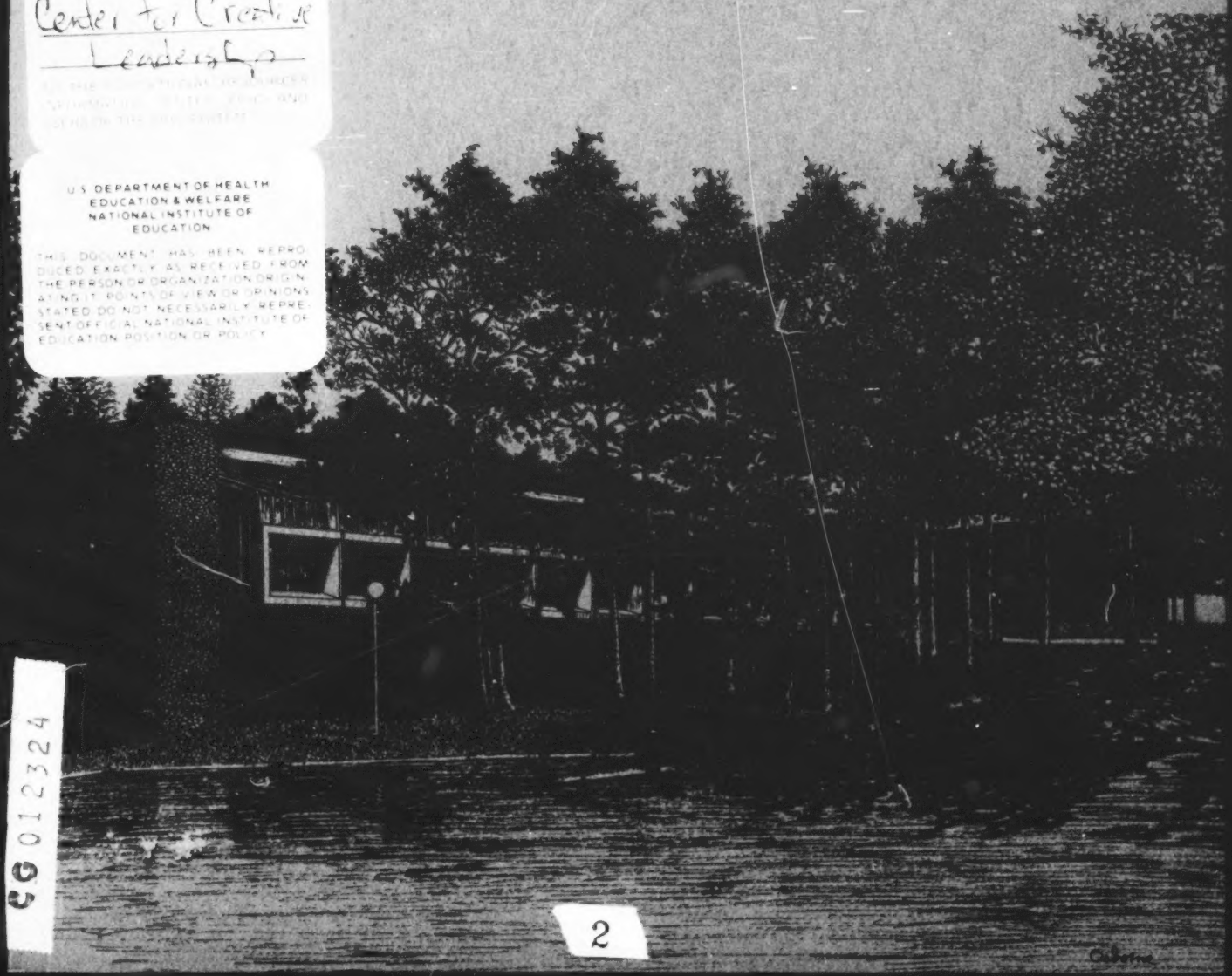

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LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP: OF SUBSTANCE AND SHADOW

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Center for Creative Leadership

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The Center for Creative Leadership is a nonprofit, educational institution founded by the Smith Richardson Foundation. The Center's primary goal is to translate the knowledge of the behavioral sciences into useful applications for people in leadership positions. Toward this goal, the Center conducts and reviews relevant research and uses these findings in a variety of training programs.

Abstract

The Research Division of the Center for Creative Leadership is committed to staying abreast of research on leadership and to developing new approaches to and research on that elusive topic. This paper examines some of the problems with the accumulated research on leadership, reviews some studies of managerial work that stimulate new ways of thinking about leadership in organizations, and suggests some directions that might improve our understanding of the topic.

LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP: OF SUBSTANCE AND SHADOW

Morgan W. McCall, Jr.

There are at least two ways to approach the topic of leadership. The first is from the emotional, experiential frame of reference which captures the colorful and dramatic flavor of myth and legend--of the fate of nations and the course of history. The second is an empirical approach based on research about this nebulous topic. If the former is bright orange, the latter is decidedly slate gray.

The bright orange side of leadership emerges when people are asked to name highly effective leaders. The most frequently mentioned--Hitler, Churchill, Kennedy, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Gandhi--all played a significant part in world history. The characteristics attributed to such effective leaders--charisma, intelligence, persuasiveness, dynamism, energy--also reflect the almost mystical power of central figures in world events.

The essence of the powerful leader's impact has been captured in song, poem, and novel. One example is Tolstoy's description of Napoleon:

> Napoleon was standing a little in front of his marshals, on a little grey horse, wearing the same blue overcoat he had worn throughout the Italian campaign. He was looking intently and silently at the hills, which stood up out of the sea of mist, and the Russian troops moving across them in the distance, and he listened to the sounds of firing in the valley. His face--still thin in those days--did not stir a single muscle; his gleaming eyes were fixed intently on one spot....
>
> When the sun had completely emerged from the fog, and was glittering with dazzling brilliance over the fields and the mist (as though he had been waiting for that to begin the battle), he took his glove off his handsome white hand, made a signal with it to his marshals, and gave orders for the battle to begin.
>
> (From War and Peace)

Given the emotional power of leadership, it is no surprise that social scientists have devoted massive amounts of time and resources to studying it. Researchers have looked at leadership in almost every conceivable setting, from army squads to executives; they have examined personality traits, leadership styles, situational contingencies, and a multitude of other topics pertinent to leadership. With leadership studies appearing at a rate of more than 170 a year(1), it seems reasonable to ask what we know about this elusive topic.

Skipping Through a Minefield

At a recent conference on the "frontiers" of leadership research, the concluding speaker made the following comment:

> The heresy I propose is that the concept of leadership itself has outlived its usefulness. Thus I suggest we abandon it in favor of some other more fruitful way of cutting up the theoretical pie.
>
> (Miner, 1975, p. 5)

After over forty years of empirical investigation, leadership remains an enigma. In 1959 Warren Bennis suggested reasons for this state of affairs, and seventeen years later his points still seem valid.

First, the term leadership has never been clearly defined. Ralph Stogdill, in a recent mammoth review of the leadership research, pointed out that "there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (1974, p. 7). Perhaps the closest thing to a consensus on a definition for leadership is that it is a social influence process. Since most interactions involve social influence, such categorizations of leadership have not helped much.

The lack of a generally agreed upon definition of the central concept has led to a proliferation of terms to deal with leadership phenomena. The last ten years have seen the appearance of at least four different "contingency" models as well as path-goal and open system models, not to mention

transactional and vertical dyad approaches, normative and integrative models, and four-factor and behavioral theories.

Second, the "growing mountain" of research data has produced an impressive mass of contradictions. The dimensions of the mountain were suggested by Stogdill's (1974) review of the leadership literature which covered over 3,000 studies. While numerous models, theories, and approaches exist, the accumulated research has not yet produced a unified and generally accepted paradigm for research on the topic, much less a clear understanding of the phenomenon. In fact, Warren Bennis's 1959 summary is even more accurate today:

> Of all the hazy and confounding areas in social psychology, leadership theory undoubtedly contends for top nomination. And, ironically, probably more has been written and less known about leadership than about any other topic in the behavioral sciences.
>
> (pp. 259-260)

Naturally enough, much of the early work on leadership attempted to isolate the characteristics of people distinguishing leaders from nonleaders, or successful from unsuccessful leaders. Almost every conceivable trait and characteristic, from activity to weight, have been examined, but the results have been equivocal. The initial hope that leaders shared common characteristics across situations has not been borne out, and it now appears that personal characteristics are related to leadership outcomes only in the context of specific situations (Gibb, 1969; Campbell et al., 1970). Unfortunately it is not yet clear which aspects of the situation are most critical.

Another major approach to leadership involves the "style" a leader uses in dealing with subordinates. Many different labels have been generated to describe essentially two styles of leadership (the number of "styles" ranges from two to five): task oriented and person (consideration) oriented. While initially intended to reflect the <u>behavior</u> of leaders, styles are most commonly measured by one of several paper-and-pencil questionnaires; thus, they represent self or others' reported perceptions rather than actual behavior.

The human relations school at first contended that leaders should emphasize considerate, participative styles. Consideration of employee feelings and allowing participation in decision making would result in increased satisfaction

which, it was thought, would improve performance. While considerate leader behavior did generally lead to increased satisfaction, satisfaction did not necessarily lead to improved performance. Equivocal and sometimes negative results (Stogdill, 1974) indicated that this normative approach was not the answer in all situations.

Other researchers (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1964) argued that an effective leader must be high on structuring and high on consideration. Again, the data did not clearly conform to the normative prescriptions (e.g., Larson et al., 1975). Further refinements aimed at isolating the specific situations in which certain styles are effective (e.g., Vroom & Yetton, 1973) have replaced the earlier, simpler models, but as yet no adequate taxonomy of situational components exists.

Data do exist, however, that leaders change their behavior in response to situational conditions (Hill & Hughes, 1974) and to subordinate behaviors (Farris & Lim, 1969; Greene, 1975; Lowin & Craig, 1968). Leaders are not perceived by subordinates as having "one style" (Hill, 1973). Thus, the search for invariant truth--the one-best-way approach--may not hold answers, even when the model includes situational moderators. Leaders may have numerous behaviors to choose from (not two or three) and may face a wide variety of different situations. A number of leadership behaviors may be equally effective in the same situation. As researchers include task structures, power, hierarchical level, subordinate expectations, and other organizational characteristics in their models, predictive power and model complexity increase. But only one thing is clear--no one leadership style is effective in all situations.

Thus early work made an important contribution to understanding leadership. It showed that neither personal characteristics nor styles of leader behavior could predict leadership effectiveness across situations. More importantly, these findings steered leadership researchers toward identifying the characteristics of situations which might interact with personality or style dimensions to generate positive outcomes.

Most of the current theories have retained the basic ingredients of the earlier models while adding situational contingencies. Although the specific variables included vary, the basic contingency approach is illustrated in Figure 1.

The relationships studied in contingency frameworks still reflect leadership's research origins in individual and group psychology. The focal unit is the leader and a group of followers. The outcomes (dependent variables)

Figure 1

THE BASIC MODEL FOR CONTINGENCY APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

LEADER CHARACTERISTIC (e.g., style, personality)	SITUATIONAL CHARACTERISTIC (e.g., group task member expectations)	Relationship with GROUP OUTCOME (e.g., performance or satisfaction)
A	X	Positive
A	Y	Negative or unrelated
B	X	Negative or unrelated
B	Y	Positive

generally represent an index of the performance or satisfaction of the follower group, and the independent variables are still characteristics or "behaviors" of the leader. The relationships between the leader and group outcomes are contingent on some aspect of the situation.

Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory has been a focus for many current researchers and provides a good example of the contingency approach. Fiedler postulated that the effectiveness of a group depends on the leader's motivational orientation (person vs. task) and on the nature of the situation (determined by the structuredness of the task, the position of power of the leader, and the quality of leader-member relations). The elaborate model contains a continuum of situational favorableness (from highly favorable to highly unfavorable) and postulates that task-motivated leaders are effective in both highly favorable and unfavorable situations, while person-motivated leaders are effective in the moderate situations.

The path-goal model (Evans, 1970; House, 1971) provides another example of the contingency approach. Built on an expectancy theory framework, the path-goal model argues that a leader's style (task or person orientation) is effective when it clarifies linkages between subordinate effort and

valued outcomes. Thus leader behavior has contingent effects on group outcomes depending upon the presence or absence of performance-outcome linkages.

In spite of their logical appeal, the contingency models have still yielded contradictory research results. As Korman (1974) has pointed out, the contingency approach "has been a great leap forward in the complexity and sophistication of theoretical formulations and the range of variables which have come under consideration," but he goes on to add, "there has also been a neglect of some basic considerations." Included in such considerations are issues of measurement, the continued focus on personality constructs, a static rather than dynamic view of leadership processes, and a failure to extend situational factors beyond those relevant to the immediate work group.

In the long run, the test of leadership theory is its utility for those individuals who find themselves in leadership roles. The bulk of current research has made some contribution by sensitizing practitioners to the differences among leadership styles and, in general, to the complexity of the leadership process. But researchers are still a long way from an integrated understanding of leadership processes, and are equally far from providing organizational leaders with integrated and validated models of leadership.

Relative to the bulk of research on styles, characteristics, and contingencies, a small number of studies have examined what organizational leaders actually do. Many researchers dismiss the results of such studies because, it is argued, leadership and management (or headship) are different things. Unfortunately, the lack of consensus about the meaning of leadership makes it difficult to find leaders and follow them around. People who occupy leadership roles in organizations (foremen, managers, executives), however, can be identified and studied. The results of such efforts have produced some thought-provoking approaches which might clarify some of the confusion in the more traditional leadership literature.

The Demands of the Leadership Role

No es lo mismo hablar de toros, que estar
en el redondel.(2)

Data on the day-to-day activities of leadership role occupants shed some light on (a) the pace of management work, (b) the degree to which the work group itself is a focus of managerial interaction, (c) the kinds of media

central to managerial activity, and (d) a global picture of what life is like in the leadership bullring. These, in turn, challenge several assumptions which seemingly underlie leadership theories based on the leader-group paradigm.

The Pace of Managerial Work

Many models of leadership, particularly those advocating participative management or situational determination of an appropriate leadership style, seem to assume that leaders have (a) a relatively small number of events about which style decisions must be made, and (b) enough time to analyze the situation and choose a style.

Two studies of foremen provide an interesting insight into these assumptions. In one study, foremen engaged in an average of 583 activities in a day (Guest, 1955-56); and in another, foremen averaged between 200 and 270 activities per eight-hour day. Other studies of higher level managers confirm the unrelenting pace of managerial work. One study of a Swedish top executive found that he was undisturbed for 23 minutes or more only 12 times in 35 days (Carlson, 1951). Mintzberg (1973), in a study of five top executives, found that half of their activities lasted nine minutes or less, and only 1/10 lasted more than one hour. Mintzberg's observations led him to conclude that a manager's activities are "characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation" (1973, p. 31).

The hectic pace of managerial work is exacerbated by the manager's relative lack of control over it. Mintzberg (1975) found, for example, that the managers in his study initiated only 32 percent of their contacts and that 93 percent of the contacts were arranged on an "ad hoc" basis.

The pace of the work has implications for training, research, and practice. Because there are so many activities in a day and because there is so little uninterrupted time, the occupant of a formal leadership role must be, as Mintzberg (1973) calls it, proficient at superficiality. Training models which advocate "rational" decision strategies (e.g., analyzing each situation to determine the appropriate decision style) make sense, but they are extremely difficult for a manager to implement. Research approaches which ignore the day-to-day process of leadering are missing what may be critical dimensions--the crunch of the pace and the breadth of the activities. Finally, managers themselves can be easily overwhelmed. The work is demanding and largely reactive. Activities that require little time and are relatively routine may postpone other activities that are

ambiguous and have no routine solution. Thus, larger decisions may be made by default.

Time With the Work Group

The fact that almost all current models of leadership focus on the leader and the immediate work group suggests that the relationship between leader and led is the most important aspect of the leadership process. Translated into what managers do, one might expect that almost all of a manager's time is spent with members of the group.

Dubin's (1962) review indicates that foremen spend between 34 and 60 percent of their interaction time with subordinates. Mintzberg's (1973) executives spent only 48 percent of their contact time with subordinates, even though the subordinate groups contained most of their respective organizational memberships. This indicates that managers spend between 40 and 66 percent of their time with non-subordinates--a group including superiors, peers, professional colleagues, members of other departments and units, and outsiders. Dubin concluded in his review that:

> It cannot be too strongly emphasized that horizontal relations among peers in management and the nonformal behavior systems through which such interactions are carried out constitute a dimension of organizational behavior long neglected and probably as important as authority relations.
>
> (Dubin, 1962, p. 15)

Surprisingly, managers spend relatively little of their interaction time with their superiors (Brewer & Tomlinson, 1963-64; seldom more than 1/5 and usually closer to 1/10 according to Mintzberg, 1973).

The mosaic of available data shows that there is considerable variability in the amount of time a manager spends in contact with subordinates. While it is generally true that subordinate interactions consume the largest single block of a manager's time, it should not be concluded that leader-subordinate relationships are the only or even the most important aspects of the leadership process. In one study of 60 managers, group members accounted for an

average of only 23.4 percent of the total number of information sources listed by the leader (McCall, 1974).

More research on leadership needs to focus on the leader-system relationship and how the organizational leader fits into the interaction matrix. Sayles (1964) and Mintzberg (1973), among others, have emphasized the major importance and complexity of the manager's information network. Unfortunately, empirical investigation of the impact of nonsubordinate interactions on leadership effectiveness is sorely lacking.

Many leadership development programs also suffer because of narrow leader/follower paradigms. Since there are few data on the impact and nature of other relationships, it is not surprising that few training programs deal with them. One cannot help wondering, though, if we are creating a generation of managers who believe that their style with their immediate subordinates is the only matter of concern.

Managers and Media

Studies of what managers do consistently find that their work is primarily oral. Brewer and Tomlinson (1963-64), Burns (1954), Dubin (1962), Dubin and Spray (1964), and Mintzberg (1973) all cite evidence emphasizing the high percentage of managerial time spent talking. Much of this talk is directed at exchanging information (Horne & Lupton, 1965; Mintzberg, 1973), and very little of it is spent giving orders or issuing instructions (Horne & Lupton, 1965).

With between 60 and 80 percent of their time spent in oral exchanges, formal leaders cannot spend too much time with written communications (Dubin, 1962). A successful leader, therefore, must have the ability to selectively "hear," retain, and transmit vast quantities of oral information and, perhaps even more difficult, selectively utilize a vast volume of written information provided routinely by the organization.(3) In communicating with others, the manager would do well to remember that other managers, too, are focusing on the spoken word--things in writing just do not get the time, in general, that is available for an oral communication.

What Leaders Do: An Integration

For formal leaders in organizations, the data indicate that the world consists of many activities (most of them of short duration), frequent interruptions, a large network of contacts extending far beyond the immediate work group, and

a preponderance of oral interaction. How do these characteristics fit in with the mythology and empirical work on leadership?

First, notice that these dimensions of leadership represent the day-to-day processes that go on between the leader's "moments of glory." It is easy to latch on the "Ich bin ein Berliner" and "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat," thereby ignoring what Kennedy or Churchill did in the daily conduct of their leadership roles. To the extent that we do know what these leaders were like, we owe that knowledge to journalists and not to the empirical leadership literature.(4) Most of the leaders with whom we have direct contact--our bosses, politicians, community figures, and gang leaders--have less grandiose moments of glory, but they too engage in the process of leadering. What observational studies have shown us is that the leadership we react to--the inspiration, or lack of it, the autocratic or democratic behavior--is only a part of the larger and more complex set of phenomena comprising the role of leader.

Second, leadership models which emphasize the "style" of a leader vis-a-vis the follower group have limited utility, even when they introduce situational contingencies. They have no explanatory power when it comes to nonsubordinate interactions, and it is difficult to understand the relationship between some global measure of a leader's style and the literally hundreds of activities that are part of the daily life of a manager. The concentration on leadership style that pervades all of the mainstream leadership research reminds one of what Omar Bradley once said in a different context:

> ...This strategy would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy.

Third, the results of observational studies suggest a host of different variables and questions that might direct future leadership research and which pose challenges to leadership trainers. The presence of nonauthority relationships and the emphasis on oral communication, coupled with the nonrational way decisions get made (e.g., Cyert & March, 1963; Katz & Kahn, 1966; March & Simon, 1958; Pettigrew, 1973), suggest that a major element of the leadership process is political. While social scientists have advocated the inclusion of political activity in studies of leadership

(e.g., Lundberg, 1977, has talked about coalitions, lieutenants, and shadows), little empirical work in leadership has confronted these issues directly.

Another approach involves looking systematically at the impact of oral communication on leadership processes and outcomes. Skill in oral communication is measured routinely in some assessment center operations (Bray et al., 1974), but it has not received adequate attention as a variable in leadership (except in some small group studies where total talk time has been related to the group's nomination of a leader, e.g., Jaffee & Lucas, 1969). Related to the communication dimension are the cognitive processes whereby individuals in leadership roles somehow retain the information transmitted in oral interactions. Unlike the written word, which automatically creates a record for future reference, the spoken word is easily lost.

More intriguing yet is Mintzberg's notion of proficient superficiality. Plagued by interruptions and activities of short duration, how do leaders synthesize, integrate, and understand the larger picture? Direct observation of behavior can produce a catalog of activities, but it cannot shed much light on the actor's mediation of events. How do all those activities fit together for the leader? One interpretation of the huge number of activities in the manager's day is that each activity represents a different situation. Most current leadership theories would imply that the manager should apply the correct style in each situation and thereby achieve the greatest effectiveness. Another way of looking at the problem is to say that leaders face a near-infinite set of situations and engage in a near-infinite set of behaviors. Many different combinations of behaviors may be effective in a given situation, so there may not be any one best way of responding. If so, the search for invariant truth is an academic exercise and any real understanding of leadership will involve a more holistic approach--one that looks beyond superficial behaviors and simplified taxonomies of situations.

Training and Leadership

If our understanding of leadership is less than adequate, then we might predict that training based on that knowledge would produce equivocal research results. Campbell reviewed the empirical literature on training and development and concluded, "In sum, we know a few things but not very much" (1971, p. 593). Stogdill also reviewed the leadership training literature and reached a similarly

concise conclusion: "It must be concluded that the research on leadership training is generally inadequate in both design and execution. It has failed to address itself to the most crucial problems of leadership..." (1974, p. 199).

Most leadership training based on the behavioral science approach to leadership repeats the mistakes of leadership research: (a) it tends to focus quite narrowly on the relationship between the leader and the group, and specifically on the issue of leadership style, (b) it fails to take into account the nature of managerial work--many activities, fragmentation, variety, nonhierarchical relationships, etc., and (c) when situational considerations are included in training, they tend to be limited to the situation of the immediate work group (e.g., the task of the group or the nature of the immediate problem).

It may be useful for leaders to develop a knowledge of leadership styles and a sensitivity to their contingent application, but applying such learning on the job is a different matter. Instead of teaching content, leadership training courses might better focus on creating situations reflecting the daily demands of the leadership role and, through the use of extensive feedback, allow the trainees to study their performance and its impact. While the value of simulations for research and training purposes has been articulated for some time (e.g., Weick, 1965), few organizational simulations have been designed and utilized.(5)

One result of the hectic pace of managerial work is that managers seldom have time to reflect on their behavior. On-the-job feedback is likely to be fragmented, badly timed, vague, and sometimes lacking entirely. One valuable outcome of a training experience is that it can provide the time for reflection on the process of leadering. To maximize this potential, the training must generate behavior approximating that in the organizational role and must provide valid feedback on what the behaviors were and what their impact was. T-groups are high in generating feedback, but they create a situation with few parallels in the organizational setting. Thus, transfer of learning from the training situation to the job is difficult (Campbell & Dunnette, 1968). Simulations, too, can only be approximations of reality, but we do know enough about the context of managerial work to create reasonable approximations.

Taking Process Seriously

In 1970 Campbell et al. depicted the leadership process as a function of the person, the behavior, the outcomes of

behavior, environmental influences, and feedback. Advocacy of a "systems" perspective on organizations and the leadership processes within them is not new (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1966; Rosen, 1970; Rubin & Goldman, 1968; Weick, 1969), and the current abundance of contingency models of leadership is a sign that researchers are moving more in that direction. Still, a number of current trends in leadership research seem to be holding back progress: (a) attempting to categorize a wide range of leadership behaviors into a few simple categories (e.g., structure and consideration), (b) defining the situation as a few simple categories focused on only the immediate situation (e.g., the task of the group) and the interpersonal relations between leader and led, (c) measuring leadership outcomes solely on the basis of group effectiveness, and (d) emphasizing static rather than dynamic components of the organizational context (i.e., assuming that the situation stays the same over time).

While it is relatively easy to be critical of social science, it is more challenging to offer alternative approaches. Fortunately, there are alternatives for looking at leadership.

First, Mintzberg (1973) has shown that the classification of leader behaviors can be extended beyond the two basic styles of structure and consideration. Drawing on his observations of managerial work, he generated ten basic roles which he argued are typical of most managerial jobs. Only one, what he calls "leader," focuses exclusively on the leader-subordinate interaction, while the other nine encompass such activities as monitoring and disseminating information, acting as a figurehead, negotiating, handling disturbances, etc. Mintzberg's work is only a beginning, but breaking the set of leadership styles and moving toward a more representative sampling of the behaviors involved in leadership heralds a productive advance in research and training.

Second, the introduction of environmental (as opposed to situational) variables into the leadership context has yielded some interesting results. Pfeffer (1977), for example, has argued that leadership doesn't matter as much as we think it does. Reviewing a number of studies which examined the impact of such things as budgets, economic conditions, changes in top executive positions, and role-set expectations, he found that these and similar factors frequently override the effects of leadership on organizational outcomes.

To date, most leadership theories make the implicit assumption that the leader has a great deal of unilateral control; if the leader only used the appropriate style, the

group would be more productive; if the leader understood group processes, the group would be more cohesive, creative, and effective. Understanding how non-leader variables influence such outcomes would help both researchers and leaders by providing a more realistic perspective on just what the leader can and cannot hope to achieve.

Third, the measure of leader effectiveness is not and cannot be a simple index of group productivity or satisfaction. While group level variables are important, there are too many factors mitigating the effects of leader behavior on work group outcomes; and there are many leadership roles for which the "work group" cannot be identified precisely (for example, the role of senator) or for which group output is almost totally determined by some factor such as technology (for example, on the assembly line). At a minimum, both researchers and practitioners must realize that leadership effectiveness involves a number of areas of functioning--including how well the leader deals with non-subordinate relationships, how structures are designed and modified, development of human resources in the organization, utilization and dissemination of knowledge, creating and coping with change, and actual task performance by the leader. The point is that simplified criteria are misleading, and breaking the rut of current leadership research will require increasing emphasis on the development of realistic performance measures.

Fourth, in most leadership research (and training) the situation is treated as a given. The technology is this, the climate is that, the task is something else. In reality, these and other components of a system are constantly changing. New machinery, new policies, new people are always entering systems (though the rate of change may vary), and the degree to which organizational components are interdependent is itself a variable (Weick, 1974). Leaders, then, do not simply face a number of different situations, but the situations themselves are changing. Part of the leadership process is clearly the leader's attempt to map the organizational dynamics which influence his or her functioning in the leadership role. Another component is how leaders influence the dynamics of their organizational environments by using, modifying, and implementing structure.

Some Concluding Remarks

When managers are told that their work is characterized by brevity, variety, fragmentation, a lot of activities, and oral communication, they frequently respond, "You didn't have

to tell us that." But these characteristics of managerial work, coupled with the organizational and environmental context within which the work takes place, suggest some new ways of focusing on leadership processes.

First, it is a mistake for leaders or researchers to assume that "the situation" is comprised of a small number of fixed parts. The organization and its environment are dynamic. An act of Congress, a new invention, or a new corporate president may change all existing cause and effect relationships overnight. Effective leadership behavior must involve flexibility in thinking about the givens of organizational life. Fire-fighting is the bane of many a manager's existence, but the ability of a leader to successfully negotiate through a constant barrage of changes and incongruities is an important component of the leadership process.

Second, it is a mistake to assume that a leadership role, even with its trappings of authority, implies unilateral control by the leader. Organizational rewards and structures, as well as external forces, limit both the leader's and the group's flexibility. Another important component of leadership, then, is how the role occupants create, modify, work around, or ignore the structures imposed on them and their followers. Kerr (1975) has provided numerous examples of how organizations (and the leaders in them) hope for one behavior and get another by inadvertently rewarding the wrong things. DeVries (in press) has shown that relatively simple structures used by a teacher can facilitate classroom learning. These two examples indicate that leaders can succeed not just because of personal charisma or social influence, but because of a sensitivity to and awareness of organizational structures and reward systems.

Third, much of human learning is dependent on the receipt of valid and timely feedback on the results of behavior. With all its variety and fragmentation, managerial work provides inadequate feedback--and sometimes none at all. Occupants of leadership roles carry a double burden because they must not only assure themselves of adequate feedback, but also must facilitate feedback to their subordinates (and to other units or individuals working with the unit). Since much of managerial communication is oral, the job of obtaining and transmitting feedback requires substantial effort. No individual in a leadership role can hope to take full responsibility for providing feedback for all who need it. While the personal element cannot be ignored, the leader's use of structural (e.g., designing tasks to provide feedback or <u>using</u> an appraisal system to generate valid data) and reward (e.g., basing part of promotion or salary on feedback generation) systems may be a critical component.

Fourth, political activity in the sense of developing and maintaining a network of contacts throughout the organization and its environment (Mintzberg, 1973) is a real part of managerial work. Research has not revealed much about how these networks are created and utilized, but most people in leadership roles know how important contacts can be. Many of the contacts are in non-authority relationships with the leader, and this may be the arena where the critical social and political influence aspects of leadership are played out (Pettigrew, 1973). Certainly, leadership research and theory should begin including this dimension, and practitioners might look at some of their problems in "getting things done" in light of their own interconnectedness with key people in the organization.

The four areas outlined above by no means cover all of the possibilities for expanding thinking about leadership processes. They do reflect some areas which have received insufficient attention in leadership research and training. In sum, the focus on leader-group interactions has yielded some useful information, but much remains to be learned about the leadership processes going on outside of the immediate work setting. By learning more about what leaders actually do, researchers can expose themselves to numerous activities not considered by most traditional approaches to the topic. It is in the day-to-day activities of leadership role occupants that the situational/organizational context of leadership is sharply reflected.

Peter Vaill (1977) has defined an art as "...the attempt to wrest more coherence and meaning out of more reality than we ordinarily try to deal with." In this context, he has described management as a performing art (1974). The analogy of leader as artist is potent because effective leaders orchestrate a complex series of processes, events, and systems. Understanding bits and pieces--using a stop-frame on Nureyev--can never capture the whole. Perhaps neither researchers nor practitioners will ever understand the particular magic that makes the legends of leadership. To the extent that constant practice makes the artist more than he or she might have been, expanding our knowledge of the complex processes involved in leadership may, one day, provide part of that mysterious potion.

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Footnotes

(1) Based on a search of Psychological Abstracts. The last eight years contain 1,368 references to leadership.

(2) This is an old Spanish proverb which means, "It is not the same to talk of bulls as to be in the bullring."

(3) Ackoff (1967) has discussed the problems managers face with one type of written information--that provided by managerial information systems. One of his conclusions is that managers have too much, rather than too little, information.

(4) Vaill (1977) made this point by arguing that the New Yorker is the best social science journal.

(5) One review of the literature turned up only two organizational simulations used for leadership assessment (Olmstead et al., 1973).

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